

ON BEING ACCORDING TO THE FIGURES OF THE CATEGORIES
FROM “ON THE SEVERAL SENSES OF BEING IN ARISTOTLE”
BY FRANZ BRENTANO (1862)

In this highly influential work, written originally as a doctoral dissertation, F. Brentano sets himself the goal to clarify Aristotle’s doctrine of being. He will at the end of the essay conclude that metaphysics is a science having as its object being. Being, Brentano shows, in Aristotle’s work is apprehended as an *homonym* [ὁμώνυμον], contrasted with the opposite connotation of a *synonym* [συνώνυμον]. A homonym is a word which has multiple meanings and is thus equivocal, while a synonym is a concept which is expressed by multiple words.

That being said, our author proclaims Aristotle as identifying four possible senses for the term being [ὄν]. Namely

1. Accidental being [ὄν κατὰ συμβεβηκός]
2. Being in the sense of being true [ὄν ὡς ἀληθές]
3. Potential and actual being [ὄν δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ]
and
4. Being according to the figures of the categories [τὸ ὄν κατὰ τὰ σχήματα τῶν κατηγοριῶν]

He proceeds in the next chapters to briefly, but deeply and systematically, inquire all the three first senses of being which we have listed [respectively in the Chapter II, Chapter III and Chapter IV]. Subsequently, he starts to illuminate rigorously Aristotle’s theory of the categories, devoting to it the most extended chapter and starting by reporting on the current epistemic and hermeneutic discourse surrounding the argument.

The author, as we illustrated, before delving into the analysis of being according to the categories, he wants to first clarify what the categories are and how they should be grasped. In a style reminiscent of the Scholastics, he enumerates the main experts’ stances around the topic, which can be roughly divided into three camps:

1. The categories are only the framework for all concepts.
[supported by Brandis, Zeller]
2. The categories are the most general predicates.
[supported by Trendelenburg initially in *De Categoriis* (1833) and in particular in *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre* (1846), to which the work is dedicated and clearly a main source for Brentano]
3. The categories are real concepts.
[supported by Bonitz in *Über die Kategorien des Aristoteles* (1853), Ritter and even Hegel]

After assessing all of them, he opts for the third exegesis, elaborating in detail his personal thesis and expressing it in the next sections. Although acknowledging the categories to be a framework for the concepts, nonetheless he also understands them as being concepts themselves, real concepts and extramental independent beings [this constituting the first part of his thesis]. In the second part, Brentano declares the categories to be the several senses of being, which is asserted of them in an analogous way. This analogous manner is itself disclosed as being twofold, that is as *analogy of proportionality* and *analogy of the same terminus*.

The thesis that we just started to discuss, it is expressed as thesis no. 1 in the following façon:

Die Kategorien sind nicht bloß ein Fachwerk für Begriffe, sondern sie sind selbst reelle Begriffe, ὄντα καθ' αὐτὰ ἔξω τῆς διανοίας.

While the second one is as follows:

Kategorien sind verschiedene Bedeutungen des ὄν, das κατ' ἀναλογίαν von ihnen ausgesagt wird, und zwar in doppelter Weise, nach der Analogie der Proportionalität und nach der Analogie zum gleichen Terminus.

Both theses elucidate Brentano's position on the lively debate as regards the peripatetic categories' correct determination, and we refer respectively to them as Thesis no. 1 and Thesis no. 2.

Proceeding further in his analysis of being, Franz Brentano reckons its difference from univocal concepts, which are uniquely defined by only one sense and which are categorically placed within a genus and a species. But being, as a homonym, is divided on the other hand according to its diverse sense whose we already have unfolded. Yet, considering being as a homonym it is still insufficient in order to appropriately see it. And this is exactly what our author addresses in the second part of thesis no. 2.

As we did in the preceding paragraphs start to introduce, being is not simply a homonym by sheer accident. The concept of being is equivocally named by virtue of analogy. In a very similar way, as we could say of the idea of health, a famous example which Aristotle makes to illustrate the analogical usage of words in *Metaphysics*. Healthy, we can say of a food insofar as it promotes, sustain or contribute to general health (as a cause), or of a body which is healthy in and of itself, possessing health as an intrinsic condition.

The analogical relation whose Brentano is mentioning, connotes then the categories as accidents of the substance, itself a name properly denoting being. It will now be helpful to indicate Aristotle's whole table of *predicamenta*, which the author did first outline when discussing its problematics, but whose larger clarification is given only at the end of the full work.

To the categories the Stagirite devotes an entire book, preserved in the posthumous collection of his writings on the topic of Logics, the *Categories*. As Brentano already stated in the corresponding section, Aristotle's categories are generally understood to be ten. Despite

agreeing on this, a still not totally undoubted perspective, he also contends the number ten to be achieved somehow artificially. Coming out of a compulsion from the old Hellenic religious tradition dating back to Pythagoreanism, favoring the number ten as manifesting completeness and hence the ancient idea of perfection. Thus he takes them to be eight and he comes at the end of the dissertation with a scheme of the sort.

- Being [ὄν]
which itself is divided firstly just in
 - substance [οὐσία] (α)
and
 - accident [συμβεβηκός] (β, γ, δ, ε, ζ, η, θ)
so we see the first category predicated to being and all the other categories, analogically, classified as each a possible different accident of the substance.
The accident is in turn divided into
 - absolute accident [πάθος]
this first one still is divided three-foldly in
 1. inherent accidents [ἐνυπάρχοντα]
and again in
 - quantity (γ) [πόσων]
 - and
 - quality (δ) [ποιών]
 - then in
 2. operations [κινήσεις]
and again in
 - action (ε) [ποιεῖν]
 - and
 - affection (ζ) [πάσχειν]
 - then in
 3. containment [τὰ ἐν τινι]
and again in
 - where (η) [πόῦ]
 - and
 - when (θ) [ποτε].
 - and
 - relation (β) [πρὸς τι]

So with this final picture we can accurately and in its completeness gaze at what the author means with his thesis no. 2., which we have attempted to discuss and in particular the idea of the analogy of the same terminus. While the categories in their total are comprehended as eight, they can still be additionally divided and by facing the question of being, correctly grasped. On being meant in the fourth sense, according to the figures of the categories, we realize that only the first one (e.g. substance) refers properly to it. While all the other can be conceived as

accidents of the substance, and can be then equivocally referred to as beings, only by grace of analogy, only as accidents of the substance.

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